

EXHIBIT 44

Steven Bellettini
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5 December 2021

Honorable Chief Judge Robert J. Jonker

Re: Character Statement for Christopher Allan Boden (USA v. Boden et al Case # 1:21-cr-0040-RJJ-1)

Dear Judge Jonker,

My name is Steven Bellettini. I work as an animator and science communicator in Grand Rapids. I have known Chris Boden since 2011 and have lived with him for the last 3 years--and intermittently before that. From 2011 through 2018, I worked as part of the video team at the NSI (the National Science Institute, formerly the Geek Group). That was how I first met Chris: in the earliest memory I have of him, he was preparing a street luge for a video explaining energy. In the decade since, I've seen him practically every day. Chris has been a good friend to me.

From what I know of his early life, it seems Chris was one of those kids our education system struggles to find a place for. This may explain why he so doggedly tries to provide resources for people who want to learn but lack the approach or the environment they need to do so. Even his bitcoin activity took this form; from what I saw, Chris wanted to make sure people curious about this new technology didn't get scammed. Chris has a combination of intelligence, showmanship, altruism, and hands-on experience in a surprising variety of fields that made him, as far as I can tell, the only person who could have run the unique institution that was the NSI.

I don't have statistics for how many lives the NSI touched over the years, but the number must be in the hundreds of thousands, if we include the online audience. Our facility existed to serve the community. One could not only use whatever esoteric tool, machine, or software they needed for a project, but also receive instruction and guidance. People who'd never had a computer in their home could get one at low or no cost. Most of what we had available was equipment Chris convinced entities or individuals to donate. We made scores of videos, available for free online, on topics ranging from the workings of everyday devices, to programming CNC machines, to high voltage electricity. Chris appeared in most of them, either teaching the topic himself, or acting as the inquiring student to the person who was. I lost count of the number of field trips the lab hosted, giving kids tangible, visceral examples of engineering and the physical sciences. Every week, we had folks show up for the free tour. Chris was a presenter in nearly all of those

events, and personally ran the Q&A sessions at the end of each tour. He was interwoven with nearly every function of the NSI. The fallout from the raid shattered his life's work.

The NSI was chronically short of funds. We had many paying members, but Chris always kept the cost of membership low, to ensure people who needed the facility most could actually afford to access it. Nonetheless, our operating costs were substantial. Sometimes, we had to disable the heat in less-used parts of the building, or run extension cords because the 3-phase power got shut off, or push back critical maintenance because the money wasn't available. The staff of volunteers did what we could, but in my opinion the facility would have closed its doors years before it finally did, if not for Chris putting in long hours every day on phone calls securing funding. In addition to applying for hundreds of grants, the NSI relied on individual donations (in cash and in kind), support from sponsors, an Etsy store, a gift shop--anything that could help. Chris' bitcoin business was another such strategy, and despite how it eventually turned out it was helping the lab stay afloat.

After the raid in 2018, it wasn't until late evening that the video team got a chance to speak to Chris about what had happened. By then we knew the lab would be shutting down. Obviously, we wanted to know why the lab was raided, and Chris told us. In light of the pervasive financial problems I mentioned above, I understand why he would feel he couldn't turn down the money. That is my view today, at least. That night in 2018, I was less than kind. I wasn't sure I could trust him anymore and said so. I regret to say I made him cry. Considering all he's done for me, before and since, I suppose I should have been gentler. We have observed, in hindsight, that the lab could not have limped along much longer anyway. Regardless, I have no reason to think Chris feels anything but remorse for what he did. He has since said he is finished with anything to do with cryptocurrency, and I believe him.

Chris is a charitable soul. If someone needs help, he will find a way to help them, even if he's in financial straits himself. In 2011, after only knowing me for a few months, he & Lis opened their already-crowded home to me when my precarious housing situation would have made it impossible for me to keep helping at the lab. Their taking me in changed the entire trajectory of my life and career. In the years since, Chris has helped me in more ways and on more occasions than I can recall. He gave me boots when mine were falling apart. He paid for allergy medicine when I couldn't afford it. He's bought me at least two bicycles. After the NSI shut down, Chris let my partner and I use his camera equipment to keep our YouTube show going, our main source of income. He even personally painted the room and built the backdrop of the set we use. That we could continue making the show was one of the first things we talked about the evening of the raid. He wanted to make sure we could continue our work, even while his was dissolving.

Since the NSI closed, Chris has done his best to move on. He has a number of active projects and has returned to making free educational videos from his own workshop. He's still in contact

with a lot of the people who connected with the NSI remotely, and a few of us who were core staff at the lab continue to be part of his everyday life. I hope he won't have to suffer more than he already has. Should you have any questions, or need any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,
Steven Bellettini